

Eighty years of the ‘Spiritual Message’ recorded by M.K.Gandhi.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) went to England at the age of twenty to study law. There was hardly anybody to receive him when he landed on the British soil. The same person, now called Mr. Gandhi, went to England in 1931 to attend the second Round Table Conference. A huge crowd of people poured in the streets of London to have his glimpse! Earlier in his youth, when he travelled to London, he was dressed like an average Englishman; but this time, he was in loin cloth, dressed like a poor Indian! Hundreds would gather to listen to this “Nanga Fakir” (as Mr. Winston Churchill used to quote him!). The listeners used to get impressed with his touching thoughts, expressed in a clear voice and in simple English. On the occasion of such an official speech at Kingsley Hall, the technicians of Columbia Gramophone Company were present to record his speech on shellac disc. They had in mind to make a good profit by recording his speech, as to this day Gandhiji’s speech was not yet recorded. They were also successful in persuading Gandhiji. He too supported their idea; but expressed his unwillingness to deliver any political speech. He chose his favourite topic of spiritual nature and spoke “On God”. The speech hardly lasted for six minutes. This speech was recorded in two parts and on both sides of a 78-rpm disc (Catalogue No. LBE50). Gandhiji also signed a legal contract with the recording company. According to the terms and conditions, any royalty earned by him on the sale of copies of this disc was to be credited to the “Sakal Charkha Sanghatana, Ahmedabad (All India Weavers Association, Ahmedabad).



Gandhiji in a recording session



A Gramophone machine

In the year 1931, Indian National Congress Party (INC) adopted a new design of its Tricolor flag, with three horizontal bands with colors, saffron, white and green and a spinning wheel (Charkha) in the centre of the middle white colored band. The same color sequence was chosen in designing the label of this important disc. Thus three concentric colored circular rings were used in the label design with the signature M.K.Gandhi at the bottom. This special disc was made available in 1932. Hundreds of copies were sent even outside India. The discs were sold in India

at ‘Four Rupees and Eight Annas’. This was an average monthly income of a middle class family. So the agents of recording company were not optimistic about the sale of this disc, that too featuring a speech in English! However, to their surprise people in India queued up to buy the discs and also gramophone machines. The prime attraction was to listen to the voice of Gandhiji, despite language barrier.



Tricolor flag design adopted by INC in 1931



Disc pressed in India



Disc pressed in England



Disc pressed in America



Pressed in England after WW-II

In Madras, ‘M/S Saraswati Stores’ were the official agents of the Columbia Company. In January 1932, the manager wrote a letter to the Chief Secretary of Madras Presidency, requesting him not to impose any ban on the sale and distribution of this disc, as there was nothing ‘Political’ and ‘Objectionable’ in this speech. For, such a ban would shelve some 12,000 copies in the warehouse of the stores and the company would have run into loss. Recently, in an exhibition organized by ‘Chennai Archives’ this letter of that period was on display.

Gandhiji had earned two thousand rupees royalty payment on the sale of the disc in the southern territory. This manager did not know anything about the recipient’s viz. ‘All India Weavers Association of Ahmedabad’ in the northern part of India. The business strategy of the Columbia Company was successful beyond expectations. After the Second World War, this disc was again in great demand and fresh copies were pressed with new label designs, suitable for sale in England, India and even in America.

Gandhiji was honored with the title ‘Mahatma’ (Great Soul) long ago by ‘Kamdar’s in 1915 [Ref. www.KamdarTree.com] but he never used it and did not like to be addressed with it. However he was always called ‘Mahatma Gandhi’ and the ‘Father of the Nation’ (Rashtrapita) against his own wish. After his assassination, ‘Spiritual Message’ disc was again in circulation. The disc has been listed in the Columbia record catalogue until 1956. Over 100,000 copies in 78-rpm format were sold in these twenty-five years. Today very few copies survive with the collectors, archives and depositories. Later, the recording on this disc was reissued on vinyl LP’s and audio tapes during Gandhiji’s birth centenary in 1969.

This unusual and historically important recording will be eighty years old in October 2011. Although the discs, tapes and CD’s will be preserved by individuals and institutions, the ‘Spiritual Message’ is now available on number of websites on internet. [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtWr04MBGYI>]. A simple Google search takes visitors to many sites including the film clippings of Gandhiji’s visit to England in 1931. ‘You Tube’ links to the ‘Spiritual Message’ display the text of the message along with the audio track. One can listen to Gandhiji’s voice and read the comments and the discussions by the visitors.

It seems that the message is much more relevant to the modern times of distrust, hatred, violence and terrorism spreading globally.

September 25, 2011

Dr. Suresh Chandvankar, Mumbai, India
chandvankar@gmail.com
cell - 9920813336

The text of the recorded speech:

"There is an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything, I feel it though I do not see it. It is this unseen power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses. But it is possible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent. Even in ordinary affairs we know that people do not know who rules or why and how He rules and yet they know that there is a power that certainly rules. In my tour last year in Mysore I met many poor villagers and I found upon inquiry that they did not know who ruled Mysore. They simply said some God ruled it. If the knowledge of these poor people was so limited about their ruler I who am infinitely lesser in respect to God than they to their ruler need not be surprised if I do not realize the presence of God - the King of Kings. Nevertheless, I do feel, as the poor villagers felt about Mysore, that there is orderliness in the universe, there is an unalterable law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is not a blind law, for no blind law can govern the conduct of living being and thanks to the marvelous researches of Sir J. C. Bose it can now be proved that even matter is life. That law then which governs all life is God. Law and the law-giver are one. I may not deny the law or the law-giver because I know so little about it or Him. Just as my denial or ignorance of the existence of an earthly power will avail me nothing even so my denial of God and His law will not liberate me from its operation, whereas humble and mute acceptance of divine authority makes life's journey easier even as the acceptance of earthly rule makes life under it easier. I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing power of spirit is God, and since nothing else that I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is. And is this power benevolent or malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent, for I can see that in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence I gather that God is life, truth, light. He is love. He is the supreme Good. But He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. He must express himself in every smallest act of His votary. This can only be done through a definite realization, more real than the five senses can ever produce. Sense perceptions can be and often are false and deceptive, however real they may appear to us. Where there is realization outside the senses it is infallible. It is proved not by extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within. Such testimony is to be found in the experiences of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes. To reject this evidence is to deny oneself. This realization is preceded by an immovable faith. He who would in his own person test the fact of God's presence can do so by a living faith and since faith itself cannot be proved by extraneous evidence the safest course is to believe in the moral government of the world and therefore in the supremacy of the moral law, the law of truth and love. Exercise of faith will be the safest where there is a clear determination summarily to reject all that is contrary to truth and love. I confess that I have no argument to convince through reason. Faith transcends reason. All that I can advise is not to attempt the impossible."